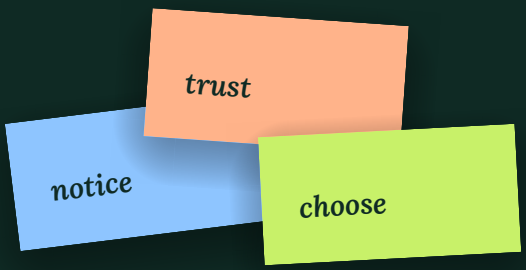
A PLAIN-LANGUAGE MARKETING BOOK

Noticed, Trusted, Chosen.

The 2027 Marketing Playbook

Traditional, Digital and AI Strategies to Grow Any Business



Jahanvi Gulati

Noticed, Trusted, Chosen

The 2027 Marketing Playbook: Traditional, Digital and AI Strategies to Grow Any Business

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A Note Before We Start

Let me tell you what this book is not.

It is not a textbook. Nobody is going to quiz you at the end, and there are no diagrams with seventeen arrows pointing at the word "synergy." It is also not one of those books that promises you a million followers by Friday. I have read a few of those. The only thing that grew was my collection of books I never finished.

This book is the conversation I wish someone had with me when I started in marketing. I began in India, learning digital marketing the practical way, by doing it, getting it wrong, and doing it again. Later I moved to Canada, studied business and marketing at Capilano University, and started building websites and marketing for small businesses. Two countries, many businesses, one big lesson: **marketing is much simpler than people make it sound, and much harder to do consistently than people admit.**

So this book has one job. By the time you finish it, you should understand marketing well enough to actually do it. Not just talk about it at a party (although you will be better at that too).

Who this book is for

- **Business owners** who know they need marketing but feel like everyone else got a manual they missed.
- **New marketers** who want the full picture, from flyers to AI, in one place.
- **Students and career changers** who want to know what the job really looks like.

- **Anyone** who has ever paid for ads, got nothing back, and quietly wondered if the internet was a scam.

How the book is organized

The book has five parts, and each part builds on the one before it.

1. **The Foundations.** What marketing really is, who your customer is, how to stand out, and how to write words that sell.
2. **Traditional Marketing in 2027.** Yes, flyers, signs, events, referrals and the local newspaper still work. Some of them work better than ever, because everyone else forgot about them.
3. **Digital Marketing.** Your website, Google, social media, content, email and paid ads.
4. **AI and the New Rules.** How AI is changing search, content and the way customers choose, and how to use it without sounding like a robot.
5. **Growing.** Measuring results, turning interest into sales, keeping customers, growing yourself as a marketer, and a 90-day plan you can start on Monday.

Every chapter ends with a short "**Do this next**" list. If you only read those, you will still be ahead of most people. Please do read the rest, though. I worked hard on the jokes.

A promise about honesty

You will not find made-up statistics in this book. When I use numbers in an example, I will tell you they are examples. Marketing already has enough people quoting a "study" that nobody can find. We are not going to add to the pile.

One more thing. Tools change fast. The platform that is everywhere today might be a punchline in three years. That is why this book focuses on **principles that last** and shows you how to apply them to the tools of 2027. Learn the principles and you can pick up any new tool in an afternoon.

Grab a coffee. Let's begin.

Jahanvi Gulati

PART ONE

The Foundations

Everything else in this book sits on top of these six chapters. Skip them and the rest will feel like building a deck on sand.

CHAPTER 1

Marketing Is Simpler Than People Make It

Ask ten people what marketing is and you will get eleven answers. Somebody will say advertising. Somebody will say social media. A cousin will say "it's when you post on Instagram and hope." One person at the back will say "the four Ps" and look very proud.

Here is the definition I use, and it has never let me down:

> **Marketing is everything you do to help the right people notice you, trust you and choose you.**

That's it. Notice, trust, choose. Everything in this book is about one of those three steps.

- **Notice.** People cannot buy from you if they do not know you exist. This is where ads, search, social media, signs, flyers and word of mouth come in.
- **Trust.** Noticing you is not enough. People need a reason to believe you will do a good job. This is where your website, reviews, your words, your photos and your reputation come in.
- **Choose.** Even when people trust you, they still have to pick you over the other options, including the option of doing nothing. This is where your offer, your pricing, your follow-up and your positioning come in.

When a business tells me "marketing doesn't work for us," it is almost always one of these three steps that is broken. They are getting noticed but nobody trusts them. Or they are trusted but nobody notices them. Or people like them, trust them, and then choose the competitor down the road because that competitor called back first.

The leaky bucket

Picture a bucket with holes in it. You pour water in the top (that's your marketing bringing people in). The water leaks out of the holes (that's people leaving your website, ignoring your follow-up email or forgetting you exist).

Most businesses respond to a leaky bucket by pouring in more water. They spend more on ads. They post more often. They hire another agency.

The smarter move is to fix the holes first. If your website confuses people, more ads just send more confused people to it. If nobody answers the phone, more calls just means more missed calls. **Fix the bucket before you buy more water.** You will hear me say this in different ways throughout the book, because it is the most expensive lesson in marketing, and most people pay for it at least twice.

Marketing is not sales, but they are best friends

Marketing gets people to raise their hand. Sales helps them make a decision once their hand is up. In a small business, the same person often does both, usually while also doing the accounting and fixing the printer.

Here is the simple way to think about it. Marketing is the party invitation. Sales is the conversation once people arrive. A great invitation with a terrible party still leads to empty chairs next year.

The three questions every customer asks

Before anyone buys anything, from a coffee to a kitchen renovation, their brain quietly asks three questions:

1. **Is this for me?**
2. **Can I trust it?**
3. **Is it worth it?**

Good marketing answers all three quickly and clearly. Bad marketing answers none of them and talks about "passion" and "excellence" instead. Nobody has ever hired a plumber because the plumber was "passionate about excellence." They hired the one who said "Burst pipe? We can be there in two hours."

What changed by 2027, and what didn't

A lot has changed. People ask AI tools for recommendations instead of scrolling ten blue links. Short videos are everywhere. Privacy rules mean you can't follow people around the internet the way advertisers used to. Making content became easy, so attention became expensive.

But here is what has not changed at all: people still buy from businesses they notice, trust and choose. The tools are new. The human being holding the phone is the same human being who used to read the Yellow Pages. They still want to feel safe, understood and smart about their decision.

That is good news for you. You do not need to chase every new trend. You need to understand people, and then use whichever tools fit.

Mind Challenge 1: The busy bakery mystery



A bakery starts running ads. Website visits double in a month, but sales stay exactly the same. Which of the three steps (notice, trust or choose) is broken, and what are the first two things you would check?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Write down the three steps (notice, trust, choose) and give your business a score out of 10 for each one. Be honest. The lowest score is where you start.
- List three holes in your bucket. Missed calls, a slow website and no follow-up are the usual suspects.
- Write one sentence that answers "Is this for me?" for your ideal customer.

CHAPTER 2

Know Who You're Talking To

Imagine giving a speech to a room where you have no idea who is sitting there. Are they teenagers? Retirees? Accountants? Clowns on a lunch break? You would end up saying something so general that nobody would care.

That is what most marketing sounds like, because most businesses never decide who they are talking to.

"Everyone" is not a customer

When I ask business owners who their customer is, the most common answer is "everyone." I understand why. Saying everyone feels safe. Nobody wants to turn away money.

But marketing to everyone is like shouting in a mall. A few people turn around, most keep walking, and you lose your voice. When you choose a specific person to talk to, your message gets sharper, and strangely, more people respond, including people outside that group.

You are not turning anyone away. You are choosing who you speak to first.

Build a real customer picture

Forget the fancy persona templates with a stock photo of a smiling woman named "Marketing Mary." Here is what actually matters about your customer:

- **Their situation.** What is going on in their life or business right when they need you? A new homeowner, a restaurant that just got a bad review, a parent planning a birthday party.
- **Their problem, in their words.** Not "suboptimal digital presence." More like "my website looks like it was built in 2009 and I'm embarrassed to send people to it."
- **What they have tried already.** Did they hire someone cheap who disappeared? Did they try doing it themselves at 11 p.m. with a YouTube tutorial?
- **What they are afraid of.** Wasting money, looking foolish, getting ripped off, making the wrong choice.
- **What a great result looks like to them.** Be specific. "More calls" is good. "I want my phone ringing with real jobs, not spam" is better.
- **Where they spend time.** Online and offline. Which apps, which groups, which events, which coffee shop.

Listen like a detective

The best marketing words are not invented. They are collected. Your customers are already telling you exactly what to say. You just need to write it down.

Here are free places to listen:

1. **Your own phone calls and emails.** What do people ask in the first minute? Those questions are your headlines.

2. **Reviews, including your competitors' reviews.** Five-star reviews tell you what people love. One-star reviews tell you what they fear. Both are gold.
3. **Reddit, Facebook groups and forums.** Search your industry plus words like "help," "recommend," or "frustrated." People are wonderfully honest when they think no business is reading.
4. **Google's "People also ask" box and the autocomplete suggestions.** These show you the real questions people type.
5. **Ask.** Call three past customers and ask: "What almost stopped you from hiring us?" and "What would you tell a friend about us?" Then stay quiet and take notes. The silence is uncomfortable. Sit in it anyway.

Jobs to be done

Here is a useful idea that changed how I think about customers. People don't buy products. They "hire" them to do a job in their life.

Nobody wants a drill. They want a hole in the wall so they can hang the picture of their kids so the hallway feels like home. Nobody wants a website. They want people to take their business seriously, and they want the phone to ring.

When you understand the job, you stop selling features and start selling progress.

One customer, many moments

The same person needs different messages at different times. Somebody who just realized they have a problem needs education. Somebody comparing three options needs proof. Somebody ready to buy needs a clear next step and maybe a little push.

- **Unaware:** they don't know there is a problem. ("Did you know your website is invisible on phones?")
- **Problem-aware:** they know something is wrong. ("Why is my website not bringing in calls?")
- **Solution-aware:** they know what kind of fix exists. ("Website redesign vs new website, which do I need?")
- **Product-aware:** they are comparing providers. ("Why choose us over the others?")
- **Ready:** they just need the easy next step. ("Book a 15-minute call.")

Most businesses only make content for the last stage, then wonder why their audience is so small.

Mind Challenge 2: The January gym



Every January, gyms sign up lots of new members. By March, many of them have stopped showing up. What "job" are those January members really hiring the gym to do, and how would you change the gym's marketing if you knew the answer?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Write a one-paragraph description of your best customer using real words you have heard them say.
- Collect 20 phrases from reviews, calls or forums. Keep them in a document called "Customer Words." You will use it all the time.
- Call or message three past customers this week and ask what almost stopped them from buying.

CHAPTER 3

Positioning, or How to Be the Obvious Choice

If you remember only one chapter from this book, make it this one.

Positioning is the place your business holds in a customer's mind. It answers a simple question: **why you, and not the other options?**

When positioning is clear, marketing feels easy. Your ads write themselves, your website makes sense, and referrals come in because people know exactly what to say about you. When positioning is fuzzy, every piece of marketing is a struggle, like pushing a shopping cart with one wobbly wheel.

The "same as everyone" problem

Go look at ten websites in any industry. I'll wait.

You probably found the same words on all of them. "Quality service." "Customer focused." "Years of experience." "We go above and beyond." These phrases are like elevator music. Technically there is sound, but nobody remembers it.

If you could swap your logo onto a competitor's website and nobody would notice, you have a positioning problem.

Five ways to stand apart

You don't have to be the best at everything. You need to be clearly different in a way your customers care about. Here are the most common angles:

1. **Who you serve.** "Bookkeeping for restaurants" beats "bookkeeping for businesses." The restaurant owner thinks: finally, someone who understands my world.
2. **What problem you solve.** "We fix websites that get visitors but no calls." Very specific, very memorable.
3. **How you work.** "One point of contact from start to finish." "Fixed quote, no surprises." "We send a video update every Friday."
4. **Speed or convenience.** "Same-day appointments." "Your new website live in three weeks."
5. **Personality.** Some brands win because they are warm, funny, calm or bold when everyone else is beige.

The positioning sentence

Fill in this sentence. Then rewrite it until it makes you slightly nervous, because it is so specific.

> For **[specific customer]** who **[situation or problem]**, we **[what you do]**, unlike **[the usual alternative]**, we **[your real difference]**.

An example, clearly made up: "For busy homeowners in Abbotsford who want a renovation without the chaos, we manage the whole project with one contact person. Unlike most contractors who leave you chasing three trades, we send a progress update every day."

Notice how the difference is something the customer actually feels. "We use premium materials" is about you. "You won't have to chase anyone" is about them.

Proof beats promises

Anyone can claim to be fast, friendly or reliable. Positioning only works when you can back it up.

- Claim you're fast? Show your actual turnaround time.
- Claim you're trusted? Show real reviews, with names (with permission).
- Claim you understand restaurants? Show restaurant work, and use restaurant language.

Never fake proof. No invented reviews, no borrowed logos of companies you never worked with, no "as seen on" for something you were never seen on. In Canada, misleading claims and fake reviews can get you into real trouble with the Competition Bureau, and more importantly, customers can smell it. Honest small proof beats impressive fake proof every time.

Category of one

Sometimes the smartest move is to stop competing in a crowded category and describe yourself in a way that makes comparison hard. A "personal trainer" competes with thousands. A "strength coach for women over 50 who have never lifted before" competes with almost nobody.

You can still serve other people. Your positioning is your front door, not your fence.

Mind Challenge 3: Spot the obvious choice



Three accountants put up a sign at the same local event. Which sign would make you stop, and why?

- A: "Professional accounting services. Quality you can trust."
- B: "Accounting, tax and bookkeeping for all your needs."
- C: "Tax time for tradespeople, done before your next coffee break."

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Write your positioning sentence. Show it to a customer and ask, "Is this true?"
- Remove three generic phrases from your website ("quality," "passionate," "best in class") and replace each with something specific and provable.
- List your proof: reviews, examples, numbers you can actually back up, guarantees, credentials.

CHAPTER 4

The Offer, or Why People Actually Say Yes

You can have great positioning, a beautiful website and clever ads, and still struggle, because the offer is weak. The offer is what someone gets, what it costs them and why it feels like a good deal. It is the single biggest lever most businesses never pull.

What's in an offer

An offer is more than a product and a price. It includes:

- **The core thing** you deliver.
- **The result** they can expect.
- **The extras** that make it easier (setup, support, training, delivery).
- **The risk reversal**, meaning what happens if it doesn't work out.
- **The time and effort** it asks of them.
- **The next step**, and how easy it is.

Two businesses can sell the exact same service and get very different results, just because one packaged the offer better.

Make the value obvious

A good test: can a customer explain your offer to their partner at dinner in one breath? If they need a whiteboard, it is too complicated.

Weak: "Social media management services."

Better (an example): "We plan, design and post three times a week on Instagram and Facebook, reply to comments within a day, and send you a simple monthly report. You approve everything in one 15-minute call."

The second one is longer, but much easier to say yes to, because the customer can picture it.

Reduce the risk

People don't only worry about the price. They worry about making a mistake. Anything you do to reduce that fear makes your offer stronger.

- A clear guarantee you can actually honour.
- A small first step: a paid audit, a trial session, a starter package.
- Showing exactly what happens after they say yes.
- Fixed pricing instead of open-ended hourly billing, where it makes sense.

A word on pricing psychology

Pricing deserves its own book, but here are a few things that matter:

- **Cheap rarely wins in services.** When people can't judge quality, they often use price as a clue. A suspiciously low price can make you look risky.
- **Three options help people choose.** Most people pick the middle option when it is clearly the best value. The top option makes the middle look reasonable.
- **Anchor with the cost of the problem.** If a problem is costing someone lost customers every month, your fee looks very different next to that.

- **Never compete on price alone unless you are built to be the cheapest.** Someone can always be cheaper. Usually they also close down sooner.

Honest urgency only

You have seen the countdown timers that reset every time you refresh the page. Customers have seen them too. Fake urgency trades your long-term trust for a short-term sale, and it is a terrible trade.

Real urgency is fine and helpful: limited spots because you really only take on four clients a month, seasonal deadlines, a price change that is actually happening. Tell the truth and people will respect you for it.

Mind Challenge 4: The sneaky medium coffee



A café sells a small coffee and a large coffee (example prices: $3 and $5). Most people buy the small one. The owner adds a medium at $4.75 and suddenly far more people buy the large. Nobody changed the large coffee. What happened?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Write your main offer in one breath. If you run out of breath, simplify.
- Add one thing that reduces risk for the customer.
- Create a small "first step" offer that is easy to say yes to.

CHAPTER 5

Brand Is a Feeling, Not a Logo

Many people think a brand is a logo, a colour palette and a nice font. Those things matter, but they are the clothes, not the person.

Your brand is **what people feel and say about you when you are not in the room.** It is built every time someone visits your website, calls your office, reads your email, sees your truck in traffic or hears a friend talk about you.

The brand promise

Every strong brand makes a promise and keeps it. A cleaning company might promise "you'll come home to a place that feels new." A bakery might promise "it tastes like someone's grandmother made it, because someone's grandmother did."

Ask yourself: what feeling do I want people to have after dealing with us? Then check whether every part of your business delivers that feeling. If your brand promise is "calm and organized" but your invoices arrive late and wrong, the invoices win.

Consistency is the boring superpower

People need to see you many times before they remember you. When your look, your voice and your message change every week, each exposure starts from zero.

Pick a small set of colours, two fonts, a tone of voice and a few key messages. Use them everywhere, for a long time. You will get bored of them long before your customers even notice them. That is normal. Keep going.

Voice: how you sound

Your brand voice is how you write and speak. Imagine your brand as a person at a dinner party. Are they the warm host, the witty friend, the calm expert, the straight-talking neighbour?

Write down three words that describe your voice, and three words it is **not**. For example: "friendly, clear, confident, but not silly, not stiff, not salesy." This little list will keep your marketing sounding like one person instead of a committee.

Small businesses have a brand advantage

Big brands spend fortunes trying to look human. You already are human. Use it.

Show your face. Show your team. Show the work in progress and the occasional mistake you fixed. Tell the story of why you started. People love buying from people, and in a world full of AI-generated everything, a real person with a real voice stands out more than ever.

Mind Challenge 5: Two plumbers, one leak



Two plumbers charge the same price. The first has a clean truck with a clear name and phone number, answers on the second ring, and texts you a photo of the technician before they arrive. The second has great reviews but a messy voicemail and no website. Which one do most people call, and what does that tell you about brand?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Write your brand promise in one sentence.
- Write your voice rules: three words you are, three words you are not.
- Check five touchpoints (website, email signature, invoices, voicemail, social profile) and make sure they look and sound like the same business.

CHAPTER 6

Words That Sell (Copywriting Without the Cringe)

Copywriting is writing that gets people to take action. It is on your website, your ads, your emails, your flyers and even your voicemail greeting. Good copy can double the results of the same design and the same budget. Bad copy can sink a beautiful website.

The good news is that good copywriting is mostly about clarity, not cleverness.

Rule one: say it plainly

If a ten-year-old can't understand your headline, rewrite it. This is not about talking down to people. It is about respecting their time. Busy people skim, and skimming people need simple words.

Instead of "Leveraging innovative solutions to optimize your digital footprint," try "We build websites that bring you more calls."

Rule two: talk about them, not you

Count how many times your website says "we" and how many times it says "you." If "we" wins, you have work to do.

"We have 15 years of experience" becomes "You get a team that has solved this problem many times before."

Rule three: features tell, benefits sell, outcomes win

- **Feature:** what it is. ("Mobile-friendly design.")

- **Benefit:** what it does. ("Looks great on every phone.")
- **Outcome:** what changes in their life. ("Customers can call you with one tap, even while standing in your parking lot.")

Lead with outcomes. Support with benefits. Mention features for the people who like details.

A simple structure that works almost everywhere

When you're stuck, use this flow for a web page, an ad, a flyer or an email:

1. **Hook:** name the situation or problem in their words.
2. **Promise:** what's possible.
3. **Proof:** why they should believe you.
4. **Offer:** what they get.
5. **Next step:** one clear action.

Headlines do the heavy lifting

Most people only read the headline. Write ten before you choose one. Some patterns that work:

- **The direct promise:** "Get your weekends back with bookkeeping done for you."
- **The question:** "Is your website quietly losing you customers?"
- **The how-to:** "How to choose a contractor without losing sleep."
- **The specific number:** "7 signs your website needs a redesign."
- **The local hook:** "Abbotsford's friendliest dog groomers (ask any golden retriever)."

One page, one job

Every page, ad and email should have one main action you want people to take. When you give people five buttons, they often click none. Choose the one thing, make the button obvious, and use words that say what happens: "Book a free 15-minute call" beats "Submit."

Edit like a tough friend

After you write, cut. Remove every word that doesn't earn its place. Read it out loud. If you run out of breath or feel silly, fix it. If it sounds like a robot or a corporate press release, make it sound like you talking to a customer across a table.

Mind Challenge 6: The eight-word rewrite



A window cleaning company's website says: "We are a leading provider of innovative, customer-focused exterior cleaning solutions." Rewrite it in eight words or fewer so a busy homeowner instantly wants to call.

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Rewrite your homepage headline using the "direct promise" pattern.
- Count "we" versus "you" on your homepage and rebalance it.
- Read your main web page out loud and cut 20 percent of the words.

PART TWO

Traditional Marketing in 2027

Everyone ran to their phones, which left the real world surprisingly quiet. That quiet is your opportunity.

CHAPTER 7

Old School Still Works (Sometimes Better Than Ever)

Every few years someone announces that traditional marketing is dead. Then a pizza place puts a well-designed flyer in every mailbox on the street, and the phone rings all weekend.

Traditional marketing isn't dead. It just got less crowded. When everyone is fighting over the same few inches of phone screen, a thoughtful postcard, a friendly sign or a real handshake can feel almost luxurious.

The trick in 2027 is to stop treating offline and online as two separate worlds. Customers don't. They see your truck, then search your name, then read your reviews, then visit your website, then call. Your job is to make that whole journey feel like one smooth conversation.

Word of mouth: the oldest and still the best

Nothing beats a friend saying "you have to call these people." It is free, it is trusted and it closes fast. The mistake most businesses make is treating word of mouth like weather, something that just happens to them.

You can encourage it on purpose:

- **Be worth talking about.** Do one small thing that surprises people. A handwritten thank-you card. A follow-up call a week later. A clean-up so thorough the customer tells their neighbour.

- **Ask at the right moment.** The best time to ask for a referral is right after the customer says something nice. "I'm so glad you're happy. If you know anyone else who needs this, I'd love to help them too."
- **Make it easy.** Give people a card to pass on, a short link to share, or a text they can forward.
- **Thank people who refer.** A thank-you note, a small gift or a discount on their next job. Check any rules in your industry first, and always keep it honest.

Referral partners

Think about businesses that serve your customers right before or after you do. A wedding photographer and a florist. A real estate agent and a mover. A web designer and an accountant. These partners can send you a steady stream of warm leads if you look after them.

Start small. Buy someone a coffee, learn how they work, and send them a referral first. Generosity is the best opening line in business.

Networking without the awkwardness

Networking events can feel like speed dating for business cards. Here is how to make them useful and less painful:

1. **Go with a goal.** "I want to have three real conversations," not "I want to hand out 50 cards."
2. **Ask more than you tell.** People remember how you made them feel, and nothing feels better than someone being genuinely curious about your work.
3. **Have a simple answer to "What do you do?"** Use your positioning sentence from Chapter 3, said like a human.

4. **Follow up within two days.** A short, personal message mentioning something you talked about. This is where most people drop the ball, so it's where you win.

Print: flyers, postcards and direct mail

Print works best when it is **targeted, useful and connected to a clear next step.** A generic flyer stuck on a car windshield is clutter. A postcard sent to homes in a specific neighbourhood with a seasonal offer and a QR code to book is marketing.

What makes print work in 2027:

- **One message per piece.** Not your whole service list. One offer, one reason, one action.
- **A big, readable headline.** People decide in two seconds at the mailbox.
- **A clear call to action.** A phone number, a short web address, or a QR code that goes to a specific page (not your homepage).
- **Tracking.** Use a unique offer code or a special page for each campaign so you know what worked.
- **Repetition.** One postcard rarely does it. Three spaced a few weeks apart usually works much better.

Canada Post offers neighbourhood mail services that let you reach homes in specific areas without needing addresses, which is handy for local businesses. Check the current options and costs before you plan a campaign.

Signs, vehicles and the physical world

Your sign, your storefront and your vehicle are ads that work all day and never ask for a raise.

- Keep them **simple**: name, what you do, how to reach you.
- Make them **readable at speed**: if someone driving by can't read it in three seconds, it's too busy.
- Keep them **clean**. A dirty truck with your logo on it is an ad, just not a good one.

Events, sponsorships and community

Local events, school fundraisers, sports teams and charity runs put you in front of people when they are relaxed and friendly. The best sponsorships are ones where you actually show up, help out and meet people, not just put your logo on a banner nobody reads.

Host your own small event too. A free workshop, an open house, a "meet the team" evening or a seasonal celebration can build more trust in two hours than months of ads.

PR and local media

Local newspapers, community websites, radio and podcasts are always looking for good stories. A business milestone, a community project, a useful seasonal tip or an interesting local angle can earn you coverage that money cannot buy.

Write a short, friendly email to the right person, explain the story in two sentences and why their audience would care, and offer to help. Keep it simple. Journalists are busy people, and a clear email is a gift.

Radio and TV in 2027

Traditional radio and local TV can still work for businesses with a broad local audience, especially when you can repeat a simple message often. Streaming audio and connected TV also let you target more specifically than the old days. Start small, test one message, and track results with a special offer or web address.

Connecting offline to online

Here is where the magic happens. Every offline piece should have a bridge to the online world:

- A **QR code** that goes to a specific landing page.
- A **short, memorable web address**, like yoursite.com/spring.
- A **search prompt**, like "Search Smith Plumbing Abbotsford."
- A **reason to act now**, such as a seasonal booking window that is real.

When someone scans or searches, the page they land on should match the flyer exactly: same offer, same look, same words. If the flyer says "spring tune-up" and the page shows your whole company history, you just lost them.

Mind Challenge 7: The postcard that "didn't work" 

A landscaper sends 2,000 postcards (an example number) to one neighbourhood. The postcard has his logo, eight services, a photo of a lawn and his phone number in small print. He gets two calls and decides "print doesn't work." Name three changes that would give the next postcard a much better chance.

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- List five businesses that could become referral partners, and contact one this week.
- Design one simple print piece with one offer, one headline and one tracked call to action.
- Choose one local event in the next three months where you could show up and be helpful.

PART THREE

Digital Marketing

Your website, Google, social media, content, email and ads. This is where most of the money goes, and where most of it leaks.

CHAPTER 8

Your Website Is Your Hardest-Working Employee

Your website works 24 hours a day, never takes a sick day and talks to more people than you ever could. It is also the employee most businesses forget to train.

In 2027, almost every path leads back to your website. Someone sees your ad, hears about you from a friend, finds you on Google, gets your name from an AI assistant, or scans your postcard. Then they visit your site to decide whether you are real, trustworthy and right for them. Your website is where "maybe" turns into "yes" or quietly into "no."

The five-second test

When a stranger lands on your homepage, they should understand three things within about five seconds:

1. **What you do.**
2. **Who it's for.**
3. **What to do next.**

Show your homepage to someone who has never seen it, give them five seconds, then hide it and ask those three questions. If they can't answer, your website is making people work too hard. People don't work hard for strangers. They leave.

What every small business website needs

- **A clear headline** that says what you do and for whom.
- **One main call to action**, repeated as you scroll: call, book, request a quote.
- **Proof**: reviews, photos of real work, logos of real clients (with permission), credentials.
- **Service pages**: one page for each main service, not one page that lists everything.
- **An about page** that shows the real people and why you do what you do.
- **Easy contact**: a phone number you can tap, a short form, your service area and hours.
- **Speed**: the site should load fast on a phone with average signal.
- **Mobile first**: most of your visitors are on a phone, often in a hurry.

Write for skimmers

People don't read websites. They scan them, like hungry people scanning a menu. Help them:

- Use short paragraphs and clear headings.
- Put the most important point first in each section.
- Use bullet points for lists.
- Use real photos instead of stock photos whenever you can. A real photo of your actual team beats a model in a hard hat every time.

Speed matters more than you think

A slow website is like a shop where the door sticks. Some people push harder. Most go next door. Large images, too many plugins and cheap hosting are the usual culprits. Compress your images, keep your site lean and test it on your own phone, on mobile data, not your office Wi-Fi.

Accessibility is good business

An accessible website works for people with disabilities, older visitors, people with slow connections and people using their phone in bright sunlight. Use good colour contrast, readable font sizes, descriptive link text, alt text on images and forms that work with a keyboard. It's the right thing to do, it reaches more people, and it usually helps your search rankings too.

Landing pages for campaigns

When you run an ad or a print campaign, send people to a page built for that one offer, not your homepage. A landing page has one message, one offer, and one action. No menu full of distractions, no history of the company since 1987. Just "here is the thing you were interested in, and here is how to get it."

Mind Challenge 8: Where did the visitors go?



A dentist spends money on ads that send people to the homepage. The homepage has a slideshow of five rotating images, a welcome message from the founder, a menu with 14 links, and the booking button at the very bottom. People visit, but very few book. Without changing the ad, what would you change, and in what order?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Do the five-second test with three people who have never seen your website.
- Make sure your phone number is tappable on mobile and visible on every page.
- Test your site speed on your phone using mobile data, and compress any huge images.

CHAPTER 9

Getting Found: SEO, Local Search and AI Answers

Search is how people raise their hand and say "I need something right now." Showing up at that moment is one of the most valuable things a business can do.

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, is the work of helping search engines understand your website and trust it enough to show it to people. In 2027, "search engines" include Google, Bing, maps apps and AI assistants that answer questions directly. The good news is that the same basics help you show up in all of them.

How search works, in plain words

Search engines want to give people the most helpful answer. To do that, they look at three big things:

1. **Relevance.** Does your page actually answer what the person searched?
2. **Trust.** Do other reputable websites and real customers vouch for you?
3. **Experience.** Is your page fast, easy to use and safe?

There are hundreds of smaller factors, and people love to argue about them online. Ignore the arguments. Do the basics brilliantly and you will beat most of your local competition.

Keywords: the words your customers actually use

Keyword research sounds technical, but it is really just listening (remember Chapter 2?). What do people type when they need you?

- Start with your services and add your location: "emergency plumber Abbotsford."
- Add problems: "why is my furnace making noise."
- Add questions: "how much does a new roof cost in BC."

Group these by what the searcher wants:

- **They want to learn**: create helpful articles or guides.
- **They want to compare**: create comparison or "how to choose" pages.
- **They want to buy or book**: create strong service pages with clear calls to action.

Each main group of keywords deserves its own page. One page for "roof repair," another for "roof replacement." Don't stuff the same keyword into every sentence. Write naturally, and put the main phrase in your page title, main heading, first paragraph and a couple of subheadings.

On-page basics that still win

- **Title tag**: the clickable headline in search results. Keep it under about 60 characters, lead with the main keyword and make it appealing.
- **Meta description**: the short summary under the title. It doesn't directly change rankings, but a good one gets more clicks.
- **One clear main heading (H1)** per page.

- **Helpful, original content** that answers the question better than anyone else.
- **Internal links** between related pages, so visitors and search engines can find their way around.
- **Image alt text** that describes the image.

Local SEO and your Google Business Profile

For local businesses, your Google Business Profile might be more important than your website. It is what shows up on Google Maps and in the local results when someone searches "near me."

To make it work hard:

- Fill out **every** section: categories, services, hours, service area, photos, description.
- Keep your business name, address and phone number **exactly the same** everywhere online.
- Add **real photos** regularly. Your work, your team, your space.
- **Ask every happy customer for a review**, and reply to every review, good or bad, politely and quickly.
- Post updates and offers occasionally, so the profile looks alive.

Never buy reviews or write fake ones. It breaks Google's rules, it can break the law, and it only takes one suspicious customer to unravel your reputation.

AI search and "being the answer"

Here is the biggest change of the last few years. More and more people get answers directly from AI, whether it's an AI summary at the top of Google or a chat assistant they ask for recommendations. Sometimes they never click a website at all.

This sounds scary, but it rewards the same thing good marketing always rewarded: being clear, being trusted and being mentioned.

To improve your chances of being recommended by AI tools:

1. **Be clear about who you are.** Say plainly what you do, where you do it and who you serve, on your website and everywhere you have a profile.
2. **Answer real questions directly.** Use headings that match real questions, then answer in the first sentence or two, before adding detail. AI tools love content that gets to the point.
3. **Be mentioned in trusted places.** Reviews, local news, industry directories, community sites, podcasts and partner websites. AI tools learn from what the wider web says about you, not only what you say about yourself.
4. **Keep facts consistent.** Same name, same services, same location, everywhere.
5. **Use structured data.** This is code (often called schema) that tells search engines facts about your business in a format they easily understand. Your web designer can add it.
6. **Show real expertise.** Original photos, real examples, clear authorship and genuine experience are harder to fake and easier to trust.

Some people call this GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) or AEO (Answer Engine Optimization). Don't worry about the acronyms. Think of it as "be the most helpful, most trusted, most clearly described option," which happens to be good SEO and good marketing too.

Be patient, but not passive

SEO is more like planting a garden than flipping a switch. New pages can take weeks or months to settle in search. That's normal. Keep publishing helpful pages, keep collecting reviews and keep fixing technical problems, and the results compound over time.

Set up **Google Search Console** so you can see which searches bring people to your site, which pages Google has indexed and whether anything is broken. It's free and it is the closest thing to a health check-up your website will ever get.

Mind Challenge 9: Two pages, one winner



Two electricians in the same town both want to rank for "EV charger installation." Electrician A has one "Services" page with a single line that says "We do EV chargers." Electrician B has a dedicated page that explains which chargers work with which cars, how long installation takes, what permits are needed in BC, shows photos of real installs, and answers five common questions. Both have similar reviews. Who is more likely to show up in Google and in AI answers, and why?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- List your top five services and check that each has its own page.
- Claim and complete your Google Business Profile, then ask your five happiest customers for a review this week.
- Rewrite one page so the first sentence under each heading answers the question directly.

CHAPTER 10

Social Media Without Losing Your Mind

Social media is the party where everyone talks at once, the music is too loud and somebody keeps showing you a video of their cat. It can also be one of the best ways to build trust, stay remembered and reach new people, if you approach it with a plan instead of panic.

You don't need to be everywhere

The fastest way to burn out is trying to be on every platform. Choose one or two where your customers actually spend time, and do them well.

- **LinkedIn** works well for business-to-business services, professionals and personal brands.
- **Instagram** suits visual businesses: food, fashion, beauty, design, home services with nice before-and-after photos.
- **Facebook** is still strong for local communities and groups, especially for an older audience.
- **TikTok and YouTube Shorts** reward short, entertaining or educational videos and can reach new people fast.
- **YouTube** (long form) is a powerful search engine for "how to" content.
- **Pinterest** is great for ideas and planning: weddings, home decor, recipes, DIY.

Pick based on your customers, not on what's trendy this month.

What to post: the three buckets

If you're stuck, sort your posts into three simple buckets:

1. **Help.** Tips, how-tos, answers to common questions, mistakes to avoid.
2. **Trust.** Behind the scenes, team stories, real customer results (with permission), your process.
3. **Ask.** Offers, bookings, events and a clear invitation to take action.

A healthy mix leans heavily on help and trust, with asks sprinkled in. If every post is "buy now," people tune out. If no post ever asks, people forget you're open for business.

Short video is the language of 2027

You don't need a film crew. A phone, decent light from a window and a clear message are enough. Some formats that work for almost any business:

- **"Three mistakes people make when..."**
- **"What I'd do if I were you..."**
- **Before and after**, with a quick explanation.
- **"A day in the life"** at your business.
- **Answering one question** a customer asked this week.

Hook people in the first two seconds. Say the interesting part first. Add captions, because many people watch with the sound off, usually in a waiting room pretending not to be on their phone.

Consistency beats intensity

Posting every day for two weeks and then disappearing for three months is worse than posting twice a week, every week, for a year. Make a simple content calendar, batch your content once a week, and schedule it in advance. Future you will be grateful.

Social media is social

The word "social" is right there in the name. Reply to comments. Answer messages quickly. Comment thoughtfully on other people's posts, especially local businesses and partners. Algorithms tend to reward conversation, and so do humans.

Don't build your house on rented land

Your followers belong to the platform, not to you. A platform can change its rules, its reach or its whole business overnight. Use social media to bring people into things you own: your email list, your website, your community. More on that in Chapter 12.

Mind Challenge 10: The follower trap



A boutique has 20,000 Instagram followers (an example number) but sells very little online. A smaller boutique nearby has 1,500 followers, replies to every comment, posts try-on videos every week and runs a monthly in-store styling night. The smaller boutique sells far more. What is the lesson, and which numbers should the first boutique pay attention to instead of followers?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Choose your one or two main platforms and write down why.
- Plan two weeks of posts using the help, trust and ask buckets.
- Record one short video answering a question a customer asked you recently.

CHAPTER 11

Content That People Actually Want

Content is anything you create that helps, teaches or entertains your audience: articles, videos, guides, podcasts, checklists, newsletters, even a really good infographic. Done well, content makes people trust you before they ever talk to you.

In 2027 there is more content than ever, because AI made it easy to produce. That means average content is worth almost nothing. The bar is no longer "post something." The bar is "post something genuinely useful that only you could have made."

The "only you" test

Before you publish anything, ask: could a hundred other businesses have written exactly this? If yes, it's not going to stand out.

Make it yours by adding:

- **Real experience**: what you've seen working with actual customers (without breaking anyone's privacy).
- **Your opinion**: what you recommend, what you disagree with, what you'd never do.
- **Local detail**: weather, regulations, neighbourhoods, seasons, local habits.
- **Original visuals**: your own photos, screenshots, simple diagrams.

The pillar and cluster idea

Rather than writing random posts, pick a few big topics (pillars) your customers care about. Then create a group of smaller pieces (clusters) around each one, and link them together.

For example, a roofing company might have a pillar called "Roof Replacement Guide," with cluster articles like "how long a new roof lasts in a rainy climate," "metal vs asphalt shingles," "signs you need a new roof" and "how to prepare your home for a roof replacement." This structure helps readers find what they need and helps search engines see you as an expert on the topic.

One idea, many formats

Don't make content once and walk away. Turn one strong idea into many pieces:

1. Write a detailed article.
2. Turn the key points into a short video.
3. Turn the video into three social posts.
4. Turn the article into an email for your list.
5. Turn the steps into a downloadable checklist.

This is called repurposing, and it is how small teams keep up with big ones.

Write the way people search and talk

Use headings that match real questions. Answer the question quickly, then explain. Use examples. Keep paragraphs short. Write like you're explaining it to a smart friend who is in a hurry, because that's exactly who's reading.

Don't forget to update

Old content goes stale. Prices change, rules change, tools change. Review your most important pages every year or so and update them. Search engines and AI tools both prefer fresh, accurate information, and so do readers.

Mind Challenge 11: Turn one question into a month of content 

A pet groomer gets asked the same question every week: "How often should I groom my dog?" Plan at least five different pieces of content from that single question, across at least three formats.

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Choose three pillar topics your customers care about most.
- Write one genuinely useful article that passes the "only you" test.
- Turn that article into at least three other pieces of content.

CHAPTER 12

Email: The Channel You Actually Own

Social media followers are rented. Search rankings can shift. But your email list belongs to you. If every app disappeared tomorrow, you could still reach the people who said "yes, please keep in touch."

Email is not glamorous. Nobody brags about it at parties. It just quietly brings in sales year after year, which makes it the sensible minivan of marketing.

Permission first, especially in Canada

In Canada, commercial email is covered by Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation, usually called CASL. In simple terms, you need permission to send commercial emails, you need to clearly identify who you are and you must include an easy way to unsubscribe. Rules have details and exceptions, so check the official guidance or ask a professional if you're unsure. The safe habit is simple: only email people who asked to hear from you, and make leaving easy.

Never buy email lists. It's risky, it damages your reputation with email providers and those people have no idea who you are.

How to grow a list

People don't join email lists for no reason. Give them one:

- A **useful download**: a checklist, a guide, a planning template.

- A **helpful newsletter** with a clear promise ("one practical tip every two weeks").
- **Early access** or members-only offers.
- A sign-up option at checkout, at events and at the end of helpful articles.

What to send

The best emails feel like a note from a helpful person, not a billboard.

- **Welcome emails**: introduce yourself, set expectations and deliver what you promised.
- **Helpful tips**: one idea per email, easy to read on a phone.
- **Stories**: a lesson from a recent project, a mistake you see often, a behind-the-scenes moment.
- **Offers**: clear, honest, with one call to action.

Automations: marketing while you sleep

A few simple automated sequences can do a surprising amount of work:

1. **Welcome sequence**: three to five emails over two weeks for new subscribers.
2. **Follow-up after an enquiry**: so nobody slips through the cracks.
3. **After-purchase**: thank you, how to get the best results, and a review request.
4. **Win-back**: a friendly check-in for customers who haven't bought in a while.

Subject lines and the little details

- Write subject lines that are clear, specific and a little curious. "Your furnace before winter (2-minute check)" works better than "Newsletter #14."
- Use the preview text (the line that shows after the subject) to add context.
- Keep one main call to action per email.
- Send from a real name, not "no-reply." Nobody wants to reply to a robot that refuses to listen.

Mind Challenge 12: The silent list 

A business has 3,000 email subscribers (an example number) but hasn't emailed them in a year. Now they want to send a big sale email to everyone tomorrow. What could go wrong, and what would you do first?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Add an email sign-up with a clear reason to join on your website.
- Write a simple three-email welcome sequence.
- Set up an automatic follow-up for every enquiry that comes in.

CHAPTER 13

Paid Ads Without Burning Money

Paid ads are the fastest way to get in front of people. They are also the fastest way to set money on fire. The difference is almost never the platform. It's the preparation.

Before you spend a single dollar

Ads amplify whatever is already there. If your offer is weak, your website is confusing or nobody answers the phone, ads will just make those problems louder and more expensive.

Before running ads, make sure you have:

- A clear offer people want.
- A landing page built for that offer.
- Tracking set up so you know which ads lead to calls, forms or sales.
- A way to respond quickly to every lead.

Search ads vs social ads

- **Search ads (like Google Ads)** show up when someone is actively looking. They catch existing demand. Great for urgent or high-intent needs: "emergency locksmith," "accountant near me."
- **Social ads (like Meta, TikTok, LinkedIn)** show up while people are scrolling. They create demand by interrupting people with something interesting. Great for visual products, events, new offers and building awareness.

Many businesses do best starting with search ads for their most valuable services, then adding social ads once they know their message works.

Google Ads basics that save money

- **Start narrow.** A few tightly related keywords with strong buying intent, not every word you can think of.
- **Use negative keywords** to stop showing for searches you don't want. A high-end interior designer probably doesn't want clicks from "cheap DIY decor ideas."
- **Match the ad to the search, and the landing page to the ad.** Same words, same offer, same promise.
- **Set up conversion tracking** so the system learns from real results, not just clicks.
- **Check the search terms report regularly** to see what people actually typed. It's often hilarious and always educational.

Social ads basics

- **Hook fast.** The first second decides whether anyone keeps watching.
- **Lead with the customer's problem or desire**, not your logo.
- **Test different creative**, not just different audiences. In 2027, ad platforms are very good at finding the right people. Your job is to give them great ads to work with.
- **Retarget kindly.** Showing a reminder to people who visited your site is smart. Following them around for six months is creepy.

Budgets and testing

Start with an amount you can afford to learn with. Treat the first weeks as research, not profit. Change one thing at a time, so you know what made the difference. When something works, increase the budget gradually rather than all at once.

The metrics that matter

Clicks and impressions are nice, but they don't pay the rent. Focus on:

- **Cost per lead**: how much you spend to get one enquiry.
- **Lead quality**: are those enquiries real potential customers?
- **Cost per customer**: how much you spend to win one paying customer.
- **Return on ad spend**: how much revenue you get back for what you spend.

If you only remember one thing: **a cheap click that never buys is more expensive than a costly click that does.**

Mind Challenge 13: The cheap clicks



Campaign A gets clicks for $1 each (example numbers) and brings in 2 customers from 500 clicks. Campaign B gets clicks for $4 each and brings in 6 customers from 100 clicks. Which campaign is actually cheaper per customer, and what does that teach you?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Before running ads, check your offer, landing page, tracking and response time.
- Write down your target cost per customer, based on what a customer is worth to you.
- If you're already running Google Ads, check the search terms report and add negative keywords today.

PART FOUR

AI and the New Rules

AI didn't replace marketers. It replaced the excuse that marketing takes too long. What it can't replace is judgment, taste and trust.

CHAPTER 14

AI as Your Marketing Assistant (Not Your Replacement)

Let's clear the air. AI will not take over your marketing and run your business while you sip lemonade on a beach. It also isn't a gimmick that will vanish next year. It is a very fast, very capable assistant that sometimes says confidently wrong things, a bit like an intern who read the whole internet but has never met a customer.

Used well, AI saves hours. Used badly, it fills the world with bland content that nobody trusts. Your job is to be the editor, the strategist and the human in charge.

What AI is great at in marketing

- **First drafts.** Blog outlines, email drafts, ad variations, social captions. It gets you past the blank page.
- **Brainstorming.** Ten headline ideas, twenty content topics, five ways to explain a tricky idea.
- **Summarizing.** Turning long reviews, survey answers or call notes into clear themes.
- **Repurposing.** Turning an article into posts, a video script or an email.
- **Research help.** Explaining a topic, comparing options or suggesting questions to ask. Always double-check facts, because AI can invent things that sound real.
- **Analysis help.** Spotting patterns in spreadsheets and reports, when you give it clean data.

- **Images and video support.** Mockups, simple graphics, background removal, captions and quick edits.

What AI is bad at (and where you win)

- **Knowing your customers personally.** It hasn't been on your calls or in your shop.
- **Having real experience.** It can describe a kitchen renovation. It has never lived through one with a toddler and a dog.
- **Taste.** It often picks the safe, average option. Great marketing is rarely average.
- **Accountability.** If AI writes a false claim and you publish it, the mistake is yours.
- **Trust.** People trust people. A real face, a real story and a real opinion are harder to fake than ever, which makes them more valuable than ever.

A simple workflow for AI-assisted marketing

1. **You decide the strategy**: who it's for, what it should achieve, what makes it different.
2. **AI helps with a draft**, using your notes, your customer words (Chapter 2) and your voice rules (Chapter 5).
3. **You edit hard**: add real examples, remove fluff, check every fact, make it sound like you.
4. **You add the human layer**: your photos, your stories, your opinion.
5. **You publish and measure** what actually works.

The more context you give AI, the better it does. "Write a blog post about roofing" gets you mush. "Write an outline for homeowners in a rainy climate who are deciding between repair and replacement, in a friendly, plain tone, including the three questions our customers ask most: [list them]" gets you something useful.

How to stop AI content from sounding like AI

Readers are getting good at spotting AI writing. Common giveaways include buzzwords, overly smooth paragraphs that say nothing, endless lists of three, and a strangely cheerful tone about everything. To fix it:

- **Add specifics.** Real numbers you can back up, real places, real situations.
- **Add opinion.** Say what you think and why.
- **Vary your rhythm.** Mix short and long sentences the way people actually talk.
- **Cut the filler.** If a sentence could appear in any article about any topic, delete it.
- **Read it out loud.** If you wouldn't say it to a customer, don't publish it.

AI and search: where customers are going

As we covered in Chapter 9, many people now ask AI tools for recommendations and answers. The businesses that show up are the ones that are clearly described, widely and positively mentioned, and genuinely helpful. You can't trick your way into AI recommendations for long. You earn them the same way you earn word of mouth: by being good and being visible.

A useful habit: every month, ask a few AI assistants the questions your customers would ask, such as "best wedding photographer in the Fraser Valley" or "how do I choose a bookkeeper for a small restaurant." See who gets mentioned and why. Then strengthen the places where you're missing.

AI agents and the next wave

AI tools are starting to do tasks, not just answer questions. Some can compare products, fill in forms or book appointments on a person's behalf. We are still early, and it's changing fast, but the direction is clear: **make your business easy for both humans and machines to understand.** That means clear pricing information where appropriate, clear service descriptions, accurate hours, simple booking and consistent details across the web.

Using AI responsibly

- **Be honest.** Don't use AI to create fake reviews, fake testimonials or fake people. That's dishonest and can be illegal.
- **Protect privacy.** Don't paste private customer information into tools without understanding how that data is used.
- **Check facts.** Treat every AI fact as "probably right, needs checking."
- **Disclose when it matters.** If an image or voice is AI-generated and that could mislead someone, say so.
- **Keep a human in charge** of anything that represents your brand.

Mind Challenge 14: Spot the robot



Read this sentence from a made-up bakery website: "In today's fast-paced world, our passionate team leverages innovative techniques to deliver an elevated, seamless baking experience." Find at least four words or phrases that make it sound robotic, then rewrite it as one honest, human sentence.

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Write a short "AI briefing" document with your customer description, positioning, voice rules and customer words. Paste it into AI tools before you ask for help.
- Ask three AI assistants a question your customers would ask, and note who they recommend.
- Choose one weekly task (like drafting social captions) and test AI on it for a month, while you stay the editor.

CHAPTER 15

Privacy, Data and Trust in 2027

Marketing used to work a bit like a nosy neighbour, quietly tracking people from site to site. Browsers, laws and customers have pushed back, and that's a good thing. In 2027, the businesses that win are the ones people trust with their information.

First-party data: the information people give you directly

First-party data is what customers share with you directly: their email when they sign up, their purchase history, their answers to a quick survey, their preferences. It is more accurate, more respectful and more durable than buying data from someone else.

Ways to collect it respectfully:

- Ask for only what you need.
- Explain why you're asking and what they get in return.
- Make it easy to update preferences or opt out.
- Keep it secure and don't share it without permission.

Consent and cookies

Many websites now ask visitors for consent before using tracking cookies, depending on where the visitor is and which rules apply. Use clear, honest consent banners. Don't trick people with confusing buttons. A website that respects people's choices builds more trust than one that quietly grabs everything.

Measure without being creepy

You can still learn a lot while respecting privacy: overall trends in your analytics, which pages people visit, which campaigns lead to enquiries, and what customers tell you directly. You don't need to know everything about every person. You need to know enough to make better decisions.

Trust is your real competitive advantage

People have been burned by spam, scams and shady data practices. When your business is clearly honest, transparent about pricing and policies, and careful with information, that becomes part of your brand. It's a quiet advantage, but a powerful one.

Mind Challenge 15: The long form



A home renovation company asks website visitors for their name, email, phone, home address, birthday, household income and how they heard about the company, all before they can download a simple "renovation planning checklist." Very few people download it. What would you change, and why?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Review every form on your website and remove fields you don't truly need.
- Write a plain-language privacy policy, or update yours so a normal person can understand it.
- List the first-party data you already have (emails, past customers, enquiries) and one way to use it more helpfully.

PART FIVE

Growing

Getting attention is half the job. The other half is turning it into customers, keeping them and getting better every month.

CHAPTER 16

Measuring What Matters

There is an old joke in marketing: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted. The trouble is I don't know which half." In 2027 you have far better tools than the person who first said that. You can know, at least roughly, which half is working.

But having data is not the same as using it. Many businesses have beautiful dashboards and no idea what to do on Monday morning.

Vanity metrics vs money metrics

- **Vanity metrics** feel good: followers, likes, impressions, page views.
- **Money metrics** pay the bills: enquiries, booked calls, sales, repeat customers, revenue, profit.

Vanity metrics can be useful early signals, but they are not the goal. A post with 50 likes that brings in three serious enquiries beats a post with 5,000 likes that brings in none.

The simple marketing scorecard

Track a handful of numbers every month. Keep it simple enough that you'll actually do it:

1. **New leads** (calls, forms, bookings, messages).
2. **Where they came from** (Google, referral, social, ads, print).
3. **Lead to customer rate** (how many leads became paying customers).

4. **Average customer value** (what a customer spends with you, over time if you can).
5. **Marketing cost** per channel.
6. **Reviews gained** this month.

From these, you can work out your **cost per customer** by channel. That single number tells you where to spend more and where to stop.

Tools that help

- **Google Analytics 4** shows how people find and use your website. Set up "key events" for the actions that matter, like form submissions, calls from the website and bookings.
- **Google Search Console** shows which searches bring people to your site and whether Google can see your pages properly.
- **Your Google Business Profile insights** show calls, direction requests and website clicks from your profile.
- **Heatmaps and session recordings** (tools that show where people click and scroll) reveal where visitors get confused.
- **A simple spreadsheet or CRM** to track every lead from first contact to sale.

Ask "how did you hear about us?"

Technology can't track everything. Someone might see your truck, hear about you from a friend, then search your name. Analytics will say "Google." The truth is "the truck and the friend."

Ask every new customer how they found you, and write it down. It's the cheapest, most underrated piece of marketing research there is.

Test, learn, repeat

Treat marketing like a series of small experiments. Change one thing, measure the result, keep what works. Test headlines, offers, images, landing pages, email subject lines and ad creative. Over a year, a dozen small improvements add up to a very different business.

Mind Challenge 16: Which channel wins?



In one month (example numbers): Instagram brought 40 leads and 2 customers. Referrals brought 6 leads and 4 customers. Google search brought 15 leads and 6 customers. The owner wants to spend more time on Instagram "because it brings the most leads." What would you tell them?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Set up a simple monthly scorecard with the six numbers above.
- Make sure your website tracks form submissions and phone clicks as key events.
- Start asking every new customer how they heard about you.

CHAPTER 17

From Interest to Customer (and Customer to Fan)

You did the hard work of getting noticed and earning trust. Someone fills in your form or calls. Now what? This is where many businesses quietly lose a fortune.

Speed wins

When someone enquires, they are often contacting several businesses at once. The one that responds first, clearly and kindly, has a big advantage. Aim to reply within the same business day, ideally within the hour. Set up an instant automatic reply that says thank you and explains what happens next, then follow up personally.

Follow up, then follow up again

Many sales happen after several follow-ups, not the first one. People are busy, distracted or still deciding. Silence usually means "not right now," not "never."

A simple follow-up rhythm (adjust to your business):

1. Same day: personal reply.
2. Two days later: a helpful follow-up, maybe answering a common question.
3. A week later: a short check-in.
4. A month later: a friendly "still thinking about it?" note with something useful.

Be helpful, not pushy. Each follow-up should give something, not just ask.

Handling objections with calm honesty

Objections are not rejection. They are questions in disguise. Here are common ones and calm ways to respond:

- **"It costs too much."** Explain what's included, what the cost of the problem is, and offer a smaller starting option if you have one.
- **"I need to think about it."** Respect it, and ask what they'd like to think through. Often there is one specific worry you can address.
- **"We tried this before and it didn't work."** Ask what happened. Show how your approach is different, honestly.
- **"We already have someone."** Great. Offer a second opinion or a small audit with no pressure.
- **"It takes too long."** Explain the timeline clearly and what they'll see along the way.

Keeping customers is cheaper than finding new ones

A happy customer can buy again, refer friends and leave reviews. Look after them:

- Deliver what you promised, then a little more.
- Check in after the job is done.
- Remember details: their name, their project, their preferences.
- Offer useful next steps: maintenance plans, seasonal check-ups, related services.

Reviews: your 24/7 sales team

Reviews influence almost every buying decision now. Build a habit of asking for them:

- Ask right after a happy moment.
- Send a direct link so it takes less than a minute.
- Reply to every review, positive or negative, with grace.
- Never fake reviews, never pay for positive ones, and never punish people for honest negative ones.

A calm, professional reply to a bad review can earn more trust than ten perfect five-star ratings.

Mind Challenge 17: The slow reply



Two interior designers get the same enquiry on a Monday morning. Designer A replies on Thursday with a long, beautiful proposal. Designer B replies within an hour with a short, friendly message and two questions, then sends a simple proposal on Tuesday. Who is more likely to win the job, and why?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Set up an instant reply for every enquiry and a reminder to follow up personally.
- Write your answers to the five common objections above, in your own words.
- Create a simple review request message with a direct link, and send it to your last five happy customers.

CHAPTER 18

Growing Yourself as a Marketer

Whether you're a business owner doing your own marketing or someone building a career in it, the most important thing you can grow is your own skill. Tools will change many times in your career. Good thinking never goes out of style.

The skills that last

- **Understanding people.** Psychology, empathy and listening. The core of everything.
- **Clear writing.** If you can write clearly, you can think clearly, and you can sell clearly.
- **Strategy.** Choosing what to do, and what not to do.
- **Data literacy.** Reading numbers, spotting patterns, asking good questions.
- **Creativity.** Finding the interesting angle in something ordinary.
- **Adaptability.** Learning new tools quickly without panicking.

T-shaped marketers

A useful idea: be broad across many areas of marketing (the top of the T) and deep in one or two (the stem). You might know a bit about everything in this book, and be really excellent at SEO, or paid ads, or copywriting. Broad knowledge helps you see the whole picture. Deep skill makes you valuable.

How to keep learning without drowning

The marketing world produces a flood of tips, trends and hot takes every day. You can't read it all, and you shouldn't try.

- **Learn by doing.** Run small tests on your own business, a friend's business or a side project.
- **Follow a few trusted sources**, not hundreds.
- **Read the official documentation** for tools you use. It's boring, accurate and underrated.
- **Teach what you learn.** Write a post, explain it to a friend, mentor someone. Teaching forces you to understand.
- **Keep a "wins and lessons" file.** Note what worked, what didn't and why. Over time, it becomes your personal playbook.

Build a portfolio of proof

If you're building a career, show your work. Case studies (with permission), before-and-after examples, campaigns you ran, results you can honestly share and lessons from mistakes. Proof of thinking is often more impressive than a long list of certificates.

Look after yourself

Marketing can be intense: deadlines, launches, numbers going up and down, the pressure to always be "on." Set boundaries, take breaks and remember that consistent, steady work beats frantic bursts. The best marketers are in it for the long run.

Mind Challenge 18: The shiny new tool



A new marketing app launches and everyone online says it's "the future." A small business owner has a weak website, no reviews and no email list. Should they spend this month learning the new app? What would you advise, and why?

Answer at the back of the book.

DO THIS NEXT

- Choose one area of marketing to go deep in this year.
- Start a "wins and lessons" document today.
- Teach one thing from this book to someone else this week.

CHAPTER 19

Your 90-Day Marketing Plan

Reading about marketing is nice. Doing it is what changes your business. Here is a simple 90-day plan that brings everything together. Adjust it to your business, but try not to skip steps.

Days 1 to 30: Fix the foundations

Week 1: Get clear.

- Write your customer description and collect customer words (Chapter 2).
- Write your positioning sentence (Chapter 3).
- Write your main offer in one breath (Chapter 4).

Week 2: Fix the bucket.

- Do the five-second test on your website (Chapter 8).
- Make your phone number and main call to action obvious on every page.
- Set up instant replies and follow-up reminders for enquiries (Chapter 17).

Week 3: Get found locally.

- Complete your Google Business Profile (Chapter 9).
- Ask your happiest customers for reviews.
- Check that your name, address and phone number match everywhere online.

Week 4: Set up measurement.

- Set up Google Analytics 4 and Google Search Console (Chapter 16).
- Track form submissions and phone clicks as key events.
- Start your monthly scorecard.

Days 31 to 60: Build visibility

Week 5: Service pages. Create or improve one page for each main service, with clear headings, real answers and proof.

Week 6: Content. Choose three pillar topics and publish one genuinely helpful article (Chapter 11).

Week 7: Social. Choose one or two platforms and plan a month of posts using help, trust and ask (Chapter 10).

Week 8: Email. Add a sign-up with a clear reason to join, and write a three-email welcome sequence (Chapter 12).

Days 61 to 90: Grow and test

Week 9: Referrals and partners. Contact three potential referral partners and ask your best customers for introductions (Chapter 7).

Week 10: One offline campaign. A targeted postcard, a local event or a community sponsorship with a tracked call to action (Chapter 7).

Week 11: Small paid test. If your foundations are solid, run a small, focused ad campaign on your most valuable service (Chapter 13).

Week 12: Review and decide. Look at your scorecard. Which channels brought customers at a cost you're happy with? Do more of those. Stop or fix the rest.

Week 13: Plan the next 90 days. Keep what worked, drop what didn't and choose one new experiment.

The secret ingredient

The secret is not a tool, a trick or a trend. It's consistency. The businesses that win are rarely the ones with the flashiest campaign. They're the ones who show up, keep their promises and keep improving, month after month, while everyone else gets distracted by the next shiny thing.

You now understand marketing better than most people who talk about it for a living. Go and use it.

Final Mind Challenge: Diagnose this business 

A family-run restaurant has great food and loyal regulars, but few new customers. Their Google Business Profile has old hours and three-year-old photos. Their website is slow and the menu is a blurry photo. They post on social media once every few months and have never asked for reviews. Using the notice, trust and choose framework, list the five changes you would make first, in order.

Answer at the back of the book.

Answers to the Mind Challenges

No peeking until you've had a real go. Your answer doesn't have to match mine word for word. If your thinking points in the same direction, give yourself the point.

1. The busy bakery mystery. "Notice" is working, because visits doubled. The problem is **trust** or **choose**. Check the website first: can people easily see the menu, prices, hours and how to order or find the shop on a phone? Then check reviews and the ordering process. More water poured into a leaky bucket is still a leaky bucket.

2. The January gym. Many January members are hiring the gym to help them feel like a new, healthier version of themselves, and to build a habit they can stick with. They aren't really buying equipment. A smarter gym markets the first 30 days: a simple starter plan, a buddy system, friendly check-ins and small wins. If you help people succeed, they stay, and staying members are the real profit.

3. Spot the obvious choice. C. It names a specific customer (tradespeople), a specific situation (tax time) and a specific outcome (quick and painless), with a bit of personality. A and B could belong to any accountant on earth.

4. The sneaky medium coffee. This is the **decoy effect**. The medium is priced so close to the large that the large suddenly looks like a bargain. People compare options to each other, not to some perfect sense of value. Use this ethically: make your best-value option genuinely good, and make the comparison honest.

5. Two plumbers, one leak. Most people call the first plumber. Every small detail (clean truck, fast answer, a photo before arrival) sends a signal: "we are organized and you can relax." That is brand in action. It isn't the logo. It's the feeling of safety.

6. The eight-word rewrite. Many good answers exist. Some examples: "Sparkling windows, zero ladders for you." "Streak-free windows, booked in two minutes." "Clean windows this week. No ladder required." Short, clear and about the customer's life, not the company's adjectives.

7. The postcard that "didn't work." Three strong changes: (1) **one offer** instead of eight services, such as a spring lawn reset; (2) a **big headline and a clear call to action**, like a QR code to a booking page plus a large phone number; (3) **send it more than once**, a few weeks apart, and track it with a special code or page. Bonus points for using a real photo of a local lawn he actually transformed.

8. Where did the visitors go? First, send the ad traffic to a **dedicated landing page** for the exact service in the ad. Second, put a clear **"Book an appointment" button at the top** and repeat it as people scroll. Third, replace the rotating slideshow with one clear headline about what patients get. Fourth, simplify the menu. Fifth, add reviews and real photos of the clinic and team near the booking button.

9. Two pages, one winner. Electrician B, by a wide margin. The page is relevant (it matches the search), helpful (it answers real questions), specific (BC permits, real installs) and trustworthy (real photos). Search engines and AI tools both look for the clearest, most useful answer. "We do EV chargers" gives them almost nothing to work with.

10. The follower trap. Followers are a vanity metric. The smaller boutique wins because it builds real relationships and gives people reasons to visit and buy. The first boutique should track **messages and comments, website clicks, sales from social, store visits and repeat customers**, then create content that starts conversations instead of just collecting followers.

11. Turn one question into a month of content. For example: (1) an article, "How often should you groom your dog? A guide by breed and coat type"; (2) a short video showing the difference between a dog groomed regularly and one that wasn't; (3) a downloadable grooming calendar; (4) a carousel post, "Five signs your dog is due for a groom"; (5) an email to the list with seasonal grooming tips; (6) a short Q&A video answering the question in 30 seconds. One great question can fuel a lot of helpful content.

12. The silent list. After a year of silence, many people have forgotten who you are, some addresses no longer work and a big sudden sale email might be reported as spam, which can damage your ability to reach inboxes. First, check that you have permission to email these people. Then send a friendly **re-introduction** with something useful, remove addresses that bounce, give people an easy way to unsubscribe, and only then build up to offers.

13. The cheap clicks. Campaign A: 500 clicks at $1 is $500, for 2 customers, so **$250 per customer**. Campaign B: 100 clicks at $4 is $400, for 6 customers, so about **$67 per customer**. Campaign B is far cheaper where it counts. Judge ads by cost per customer, not cost per click.

14. Spot the robot. Robotic phrases include "in today's fast-paced world," "passionate team," "leverages," "innovative techniques," "elevated" and "seamless." A human rewrite: "We bake everything from scratch every morning, and the cinnamon buns are usually gone by ten." Specific, honest and a little tempting.

15. The long form. Ask for only what you need for the download, usually just a first name and an email. Every extra field adds friction and makes people suspicious. You can ask for more later, once trust exists, such as when they request a quote.

16. Which channel wins? Leads aren't the goal, customers are. Instagram: 2 customers from 40 leads. Referrals: 4 from 6. Google: 6 from 15. Google and referrals bring far better results. The owner should invest more in search (service pages, Google Business Profile, reviews) and in a referral program, while keeping Instagram for trust and awareness, and maybe asking why Instagram leads aren't converting.

17. The slow reply. Designer B, most likely. A fast, friendly response shows the client they matter and starts a conversation while interest is high. By Thursday, the client may have already chosen someone else. Speed and warmth often beat perfection.

18. The shiny new tool. Not this month. The new app won't fix a weak website, missing reviews or the lack of an email list. Those are the foundations that make any tool work. Fix the bucket first, then try new tools as small experiments.

Final challenge: Diagnose this business. A strong order: (1) update the **Google Business Profile**: correct hours, fresh photos, menu link (notice and trust); (2) put a **readable, text-based menu** on a faster website, with a clear button to call or book (trust and choose); (3) start **asking happy regulars for reviews** with a simple link or a small

table card (trust); (4) post **consistently**, even twice a week, showing real dishes, the kitchen and the family behind it (notice and trust); (5) give regulars a reason to **bring friends**, like a "bring a friend" night or a simple referral thank-you (notice and choose).

The One-Page Marketing Checklist

Pin this somewhere you'll see it.

Foundations

- I can describe my ideal customer in their own words.
- I have a clear positioning sentence.
- My offer is easy to explain in one breath.
- My brand looks and sounds consistent everywhere.

Trust

- My website passes the five-second test.
- My phone number and main call to action are easy to find on every page.
- I have real reviews, real photos and real proof.
- I reply to every review politely.

Visibility

- My Google Business Profile is complete and up to date.
- Each main service has its own page.
- I publish genuinely helpful content regularly.
- I'm active on one or two social platforms where my customers spend time.
- I have at least one offline channel working (referrals, print, events or partners).

Conversion

- I reply to enquiries the same day.
- I follow up more than once, helpfully.
- I have written answers to common objections.

Growth

- I have an email list and a welcome sequence.
- I track leads, customers and cost per customer by channel.
- I ask every customer how they heard about me.
- I run small experiments and keep what works.

About the Author

Jahanvi Gulati is a website designer and marketer based in Abbotsford, British Columbia. She started her career in digital marketing in India, where she gained extensive hands-on experience helping businesses get found and grow online. She later moved to Canada, completed a Post-Graduate Diploma in North American Business Management with a focus on Marketing at Capilano University, and now designs websites and marketing for small businesses across Canada.

Her approach is simple: understand the customer first, say things plainly, keep promises and build websites that make a business easy to choose. She believes good marketing should feel helpful, not pushy, and that anyone can learn it with the right explanation.

You can find her work, her free Journal of web design guides and a way to say hello at **jahanvigulati.com**.

If this book helped you, the best thank you is to share it with one business owner who needs it.